DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 301 794 CG 021 281

AUTHOR Weeks, Kristie G.; Newlon, Betty J.
TITLE Birth Order and Perceived Birth Order of Chemically Dependent and Academic Women.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Alcoholism; *Birth Order; *Drug Addiction; *Family Structure; Females; Graduate Students; Higher Education; Self Concept; Substance Abuse

ABSTRACT

Birth order as it relates to family constellation is one of the principle concepts of Adlerian theory, and has implications for the understanding of chemical addiction. Adler premised that it was the individual's interpretation of his/her birth circumstances that was more important than sequential birth order. This study examined whether chemically dependent women's perception of themselves differed from the view that academic women had of themselves by comparing the relationship between birth order and perceived birth order of women (N=30) who were chemically dependent to the association between female graduate students' (N=30) birth order and their perceived birth order. Subjects listed all siblings, including themselves, in chronological order. Psychological position of subjects was derived using a form designed by Lohman (1982) to ascertain individuals' perception of their place in their family. The results revealed that first-born subjects predominated in the chemically dependent sample (N=10) with 9 women regarding themselves as psychologically first. When psychological definitions of birth order were used, more women in the substance abusing sample judged themselves as psychologically third (N=12). These findings suggest that women who become chemically dependent may do so out of a need to create a place for themselves in their family. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED3017794

BIRTH ORDER AND PERCEIVED BIRTH ORDER OF CHEMICALLY DEPENDENT AND ACADEMIC WOMEN

Kristie G. Weeks, M.A.
Betty J. Newlon, Ed.D.
School of Family and Consumer Resources
Division of Counseling and Guidance
The University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona 85721

CG 021281

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Kristie G Weeks
Betty J. Newlon
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Despite the substantial body of literature addressing alcoholism, research has been almost wholly derived from the male experience. Eighteen years ago Curlee (1967) pointed out "...that studies on alcoholism tend either to ignore women entirely or simply assume that alcoholism is the same regardless of the sex of the sufferer" (p. 156). Almost two decades have elapsed since Curlee's statement, but the needed definitive studies concerning women and alcoholism have not appeared in the intervening years.

Recently, an extensive search of the literature by Sandmaier (1980), revealed that of the several hundred English-language studies on alcoholism conducted between 1929 and 1970, only 28 directly discussed women. In 1982, the Journal of Studies on Alcohol abstracted 49 articles examining women and alcohol-related issues; more than the sum total in existence between 1929 and 1970. The underrepresentation of women in clinical settings, where research is most frequently conducted, men's higher reported rates of problem drinking, in conjunction with a lack of interest in the alcohol problems of women on the part of predominately male researchers have been cited as factors contributing to this dearth of research (Wilsnack, 1984).

A related area is that of multiple substance abuse among women. Women who are alcoholic use substances other than alcohol more often than men who are alcoholic according to Schuckit and Morrissey (1979) and Nellis (1980) among others. As Celentano,

McQueen and Chee (1980) noted; "Alcoholism and drug abuse present similar problems in research, have similar populations at risk, and similar individual characteristics of users" (p. 383). Yet there has been little attention paid to these similarities. The scarcity of literature on chemical dependency generally, and on female chemical dependency specifically, can be partially assignable to the division of funding agencies which conducted research in the areas of drug and alcohol abuse, resulting in two discrete domains of research (Celentano & McQueen, 1984). Hence chemical dependency, especially in the area of women, has remained essentially unaddressed.

Birth order as it relates to family constellation is one of the principle concepts of Adlerian theory, and has implications for the understanding of chemical addiction. The principles of Individual Psychology, as formulated by Alfred Adler, contain insightful statements about birth order, alcoholism, and drug addiction (Adler, 1956). Despite the considerable research conducted in the area of birth order and its correlation with various behavioral and psychological attributes (Shulman & Mosak, 1977; Toman, 1969), no research exists in the field as to the correlation between birth order and female chemical dependency.

Since an individual's perception of their position in the family is an important aspect underlying the individual's view of life, as described by Adler (1956), birth order effects have frequently been examined as a method of comprehending the influences of early life experience. Adler (1956) premised that it was the individual's interpretation of their birth

circumstances that was more important than sequential birth order. Mosak (Shulman & Mosak, 1977) has also argued that the person's unique view of their position and role should be studied, as well as their conclusions about them, rather than the ordinal position itself. Because women's early childhood experiences have a long history of being associated with the etiology of their alcoholism and chemical dependency (Wall, 1937; Winokur & Clayton, 1978; Corrigan, 1980), empirical research is needed which better defines the relationship between a woman's subjective perception of her birth order and chemical addiction.

While antisocial behavior and academic achievement are the two variables frequently examined as related to birth order, the research has not yielded consistent findings. Investigation of both these dependent variables together as correlates of birth order in the same study, could yield a better measure of birth order and perceived birth order (Neld, Ward & Edgar, 1977).

This study was designed to determine if chemically dependent women's perception of themselves differed from the view academic women have of themselves. The specific objective of this study was: to compare the relationship between birth order and perceived birth order of women who were chemically dependent to the association between academic women's birth order and their perceived birth order.

Methods

Subjects. A sample of 30 chemically dependent women was

selected by requesting volunteers from several inpatient substance abuse treatment agencies serving urban areas of Arizona. In this study, a chemically dependent woman was any woman whose use of mood-altering drugs, licit or illicit, including beverage alcohol, has caused problems in major life areas, e.g., social or interpersonal relationships. To be included in the study, all chemically dependent women had to have completed the detoxification phase of treatment.

All female members of two graduate level courses in counseling were selected to comprise the academic sample. From these, 118 women completed the instrument, resulting in 96 usable pieces of data. These responses were then divided into family sizes ranging from two to six, in order to correspond with the family sizes of the chemically dependent sample. Academic women were selected at random from each family size, and matched according to family size with women from the chemically dependent sample. As Schooler (1972) and other investigators, have suggested, birth order research can be strengthened by including family density data (Manaster, 1977; Shulman & Mosak, 1977).

Instruments. Birth order information was gathered by asking subjects to list all brothers and sisters, including themselves in chronological order. Psychological position of both samples was derived using a form designed by Lohman (1982) to ascertain individuals' perception of their place in their family.

Data collection. All 60 siubjects completed an 8-itme questionnaire designed to assess their pyschological position.

This questionnaire contained statements concerning how subjects saw themselves in their families. Chronological birth order was obtained from the subjects' list of siblings and self.

Results

The following demographic data were obtained. Twelve of the chemically dependent women were under the age of 30, with 18 women over 30. Nine of the academic sample were under 30 with 21 in the over 30 group. In the chemically dependent sample, 23 women were high school graduates and 7 had some college. The women in the academic sample, by definition, had completed at least 4 years of college. Both groups of women were predominately Anglo.

Three dominant psychological positions were used to determine perceived birth order (Lohman, 1982). Psychological position one included all subjects describing themselves as ahead of their brothers and sisters or who "felt" they had caught up to and gone ahead of their siblings. Subjects who "felt" squeezed or who were "strivers" were categorized as occupying psychological position two. Those subjects characterizing themselves as "youngest" or "not able to keep up" comprised psychological position 3.

Actual birth order of both academic and chemically dependent women is summarized in Table 1. First-born academic women comprised 36.4% of the sample, with 30.0% of the chemically dependent women occupying the first ordinal position. Second-

born women constituted 19.6% of the academic sample and 27% of the substance abusing group. Fourteen percent of the academic sample were born third, while 18% of the chemically dependent group occupied the third sequential position. The remainder of the subjects were distributed as follows: 5.6% of the academic women were born fourth, as were 12% of the drug dependent sample, with 2.8% of the academic group being born fifth, while 3% of the chemically dependent subjects were born sixth.

(Place Table 1 about here)

The association of actual birth order to perceived birth order for academic women is represented in Table 2. In general, more women, N=13, in the academic sample who were chronologically first born described themselves as psychologically first --35.1%. Four women (10.8%) in the academic sample who were second borns judged themselves to be first borns, while one woman who was born third described herself as psychologically first. Two women (5.4%), in the academic sample who were born second in their families also viewed themselves as second psychologically, while one woman who was born second described herself as occupying the third psychological position.

(Place Table 2 about here)

With the previously noted exception, academic women who were

sequentially third viewed themselves as either in the second or third psychological positions, with two in each category. No one occupied the fourth ordinal position. Both of the academic women born into the fifth ordinal position described themselves as being psychologically second.

In the drug addicted sample, as enumerated in Table 3, five (14%) of the women who were first-borns in their families, saw themselves as also being psychologically first. Two (5.6%) of the women occupying the ordinal position of first viewed themselves as second psychologically, with three of the first-born women describing themselves as psychologically third (8.4%).

(Place Table 3 about here)

Three women (8.4%) born into the second ordinal position described themselves as first borns psychologically, with four second borns (11.2%) describing themselves as "feeling" psychologically second. Two substance abusing women (5.6%) who were second borns regarded themselves as occupying the third psychological position.

Of the five chemically dependent women born into the third position, three of them categorized themselves as psychologically second, and two as psychologically third. The three women born fourth in their families viewed themselves as being psychologically third, with the only woman who was sixth in her family viewing herself as occupying the second psychological

position.

Summary

Of major interest to the present study were those findings associating perceived birth order with chemical dependency. First born subjects predominated in the chemically dependent sample N=10 (39%), with nine women regarding themselves as psychologically first (25.2%). When psychological definitions of birth order were utilized, more women in the substance abusing sample judged themselves as psychologically third, N=12(33.6%).

Research in the area of chemical dependency has not previously addressed women's perceptions of their place in their families. However, research on the birth order of alcoholics has been quite prolific, although less has been written about the birth order of female alcoholics (Blane & Barry, 1973). Previous studies have shown that ordinal last born cases do predominate even though inconsistent results have been found in studies of female alcoholics (Blane & Barry, 1973).

Birth order results for the academic sample were quite consistent with those of previous studies, with N=13, or 35.1%, of the academic women occupying the first-born position (Astin, 1969; Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1971). Regardless of the study examined, ordinal first-borns were overrepresented among women who strive for academic achievement.

The findings of this study revealed that in the academic sample, more women also regarded themselves as psychologically first, N=18, or 48.6%, of the 27 women comprising the sample.

Melillo's (1983) investigation of birth order and perceived birth order of academic women found that 46.6% of the women she examined were first-borns, with 48.3% of the subjects perceiving themselves to be psychologically first.

In summary, the results of this study suggest that women who become chemically dependent may do so out of a need to create a place of belonging in their family. Even though psychological birth position is only one of a myriad of possible factors potentially involved in the etiology of women's substance abuse problems, it is of increasing importance. Further examination of the differences between chemically dependent women's and non-addicted women's views of themselves in their families provides a way of gaining insight into the developmental processes of drug and alcohol dependence.

Table 1 Actual birth order of academic and chemically dependent women expressed in percentages.

	Birth Order					
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth
Academic	46.4%	25%	17%	3.3%	7%	
Chemically Dependent	33.33%	30%	20%	13.33%		3.33%

N = 28 academic
N = 30 chemically dependent

Table 2 Actual and perceived birth order of academic women expressed as percentages.

	Perceived Birth Order					
Actual	I	%	II	%	III	%
1	13	48.5				
2	4	14.8	2	7.4	1	3.7
3	1	3.7	2	7.4	2	7.4
4						
5			2	7.4		

N = 28

Table 3 Actual and perceived birth order of chemically dependent women expressed in percentages.

	Perceived Birth Order					
Actual	I	%	II	%	III	%
1	5	17.85	2	7.14	3	10.71
2	3	10.71	4	14.28	2	7.14
3			3	10.71	2	7.14
4					3	10.71
5						
6			1	3.57		

N = 28

REFERENCES

Adler, A. (1956) The individual psychology of Alfred Adler. (H. S. Ansbacher & R. R. Ansbacher, Eds.). New York: Harper and Row.

Astin, H. S. (1969). The woman doctorate in America. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Blane, H. T., & Barry, H., III. (1973). Birth order and alcoholism: A review. Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 34, 837-852.

Celentano, D., McQueen, D., & Chee, E. (1980). Substance abuse by women: A review of the epidemiological literature. Journal of Chronic Diseases, 33, 383-394.

Celentano, D., & McQueen, D. (1984). Multiple substance abuse among women with alcohol related problems. In S. Wilsnack & L. J. Beckman (Eds.), Alcohol problems in women: Antecedents, consquences and interventions. New York: Guilford Press.

Curlee, J. (1967, May). Alcoholic women: Some considerations for further research. Menninger Clinic Bulletin, 31(3), 154-163.

Lohman, J. F. S. (1982). Birth order and perceived sibling differences. The University of Arizona: University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI. Microfiche No. E9791,49.

Manaster, G. J. (1977). Birth order: An overview. Journal of Individual Psychology, 33(1), 3-8.

Melillo, D. (1983). Birth order, perceived birth order and family position of academic women. Individual Psychologist, 39(1), 57-62.

Neld, J. B., Ward, D. E., & Edgar, T. (1977). Two interpretations of birth order. Journal of Individual Psychology, 14, 46-63.

Nellis, M. (1980). The female fix. Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin.

Sandmaier, M. (1980). The invisible alcoholics: Women and alcohol abuse in America. McGraw-Hill.

Schooler, C. (1972). Birth order effects: Not here, not now! Psychological Bulletin, 78(3), 161-175.

Schuckit, M. A., & Morrissey, E. (1979). Drug abuse among alcoholic women. American Journal of Psychiatry, 136 (4B), 607-611.

Shulman, B. H., & Mosak, H. H. (1977). Birth order and ordinal position: Two Adlerian views. Journal of Individual Psychology, 33(1), 114-120.

Sutton-Smith, B., & Rosenberg, B. G. (1971). Sex role identity and sibling composition. Journal of Genetic Psychology, 118(1), 29-32.

Toman, W. (1969). Family constellations. New York: Springer.

Wall, J. H. (1937). A study of alcoholism in women. American Journal of Psychiatry, 91, 943-952.

Wilsnack, S. (1984). Drinking, sexuality and sexual dysfunction in women. In S. Wilsnack & L. J. Beckman (Eds.), Alcohol problems in women: Antecedents, consequences, and interventions. New York: Guilford Press.

Winokur, R. G., & Clayton, P. (1978). Family history studies IV:Comparisons of male and female alcoholics. Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 29, 885-891.